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December 23, 2003

JOHN CONYERS, JR., Michigan
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VIA FACSIMILE

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

I write to express my disappointment that you have allowed politics to violate the trust placed in the Department of Justice for protecting the rights of minority voters and to request a copy of the recommendation memoranda prepared by the career staff of the Voting Section in the Texas congressional case and other redistricting matter, as part of our oversight authority of the Department.

As outlined in the Judiciary Committee letter of November 25th, it was clear to the most casual observer that the Texas congressional redistricting process has been tainted by much more than the customary political rivalry accompanying decennial redistricting. From calls being placed by high-ranking Texas Republican officials requesting the aid of the Department in locating Democrats protesting the irregular process to the inexplicable recusal of the recently appointed Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, the activities of political appointees in the process have raised a clear appearance of impropriety meriting their full recusal from the Section 5 process. Consequently, we recommended that you turn the process over to the career staff, as had been the customary practice under prior administrations of both parties. This suggestion was made not to gain advantage, but to protect the integrity of both the Department and the Voting Rights Act.

Your decision to ignore this suggestion has placed both the reputation of the Justice Department and the Voting Rights Act in jeopardy. As you know, Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act was passed for the express purpose of ensuring that jurisdictions with a history of discrimination against minority voters would be subject to vigorous oversight by the Justice Department. In a clear signal of their objection to nature of the process, the Chief of the Voting Section did not sign the "no objection" letter for the Texas congressional redistricting plan. It is

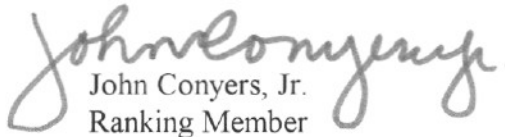
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apparent that you have turned the process on its head by preclearing a Texas Congressional The Redistricting plan that dilutes the voting strength of 3.6 million Latinos and African-Americans across the state and made the Justice Department an accomplice by allowing the corruption of the Section 5 process.

The actions of the Department in Texas and other Section 5 matters necessitate vigorous oversight by the Committee on the Judiciary to protect the integrity of the Voting Rights Act. Please forward by close of business Wednesday, December 24, recommendation memorandum prepared by the career staff of the Voting Section for the following congressional redistricting matters: Texas; Mississippi; North Carolina; Georgia; Florida; Alabama; and Louisiana.

If you have questions concerning this request, please contact Perry Apelbaum of my Judiciary Committee staff at 225-6504.

Sincerely,


John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member

cc Mr. Joseph D. Rich, Chief, Voting Rights Section
Honorable Will E. Moschella
The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.